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ABSTRACT

A classroom technique for helping elementary and secondary school students of English as a second language (ESL) integrate language skills into the language arts curriculum is described. The activity, shadow play, is used as a culminating experience in a unit on the solar system, and consists of the development of dramatic scripts based on folk tales that try to explain a natural phenomenon of a society concerning the sun, moon, or constellations. To accomplish this goal, students engage in a cooperative learning technique known as "jigsawing." The procedure involves deciding on the number of tales to be told and forming a group ("home team") for each story. Students use graphic organizers (story map or event flowchart) in planning a script, and present the final play in class. Both teacher- and self-assessment of the final projects are used. Suggestions are made for creating an in-class theater, and books containing folk tales are listed. (MSE)

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RISING STARS:

Integrating Language Skills Through Shadow Plays

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INTRODUCTION:

There has been a growing interest in finding alternative methods to monitor and assess the progress of second language learners. Many school districts, including the School District of Palm Beach County, are in the process of addressing literacy skills at various developmental levels and creating performance samples that allow students to demonstrate skills mastery along the literacy continuum.

As a teacher of ESOL in an elementary school "plug-in" model, I strive to integrate basic subject area content into the language arts curriculum as a strategy to reinforce concepts that my students are taught in other classrooms. Through active language experiences, both oral and written, students are provided with opportunities to learn a new language and the content of a class in a motivating and highly enjoyable way.

THE SHADOW PLAY:

One activity that I have used as a culminating experience on a Solar System theme has been the development of dramatic scripts based on "pourquoi" tales and other folktales that try to explain a natural phenomenon or belief of a society as it concerns the sun, moon, or a variety of constellations.

To accomplish this goal, students engage in a cooperative learning technique known as **"jigsawing."** The following steps serve as a guide for setting up the task:

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1. Decide on the number of folktales you will introduce for the activity. We chose three tales.

2. Form groups of students based on the number of stories you choose. We formed three groups. These are called **home teams**.

3. Count off by the number of stories you have chosen. Our students counted off by three within each home team. Remember: Each participant has a number and is a member of a home team. For our class, students belong to a home team for all activities.

All students who are "ones" move to one area of the room to begin their folktale. They have now become an **expert group**. Repeat this process for all numbered students.

Since students will be studying the tales in groups, they should already be familiar with graphic organizers such as a **Story Map** or **Event Flowchart** so that they can plan for their scripts. These graphic organizers can also be used by the teacher as assessment tools.

THE PLAY'S THE THING:

Once expert groups are comfortable with the original story (echo readings with teacher/paired readings, taped version of the story), they choose a recorder to draft the script on chart paper or on a computer. Once a final script has been developed, it is typed by a student, teacher, parent volunteer, etc. Students then return to their **Home Groups** and receive one of the completed plays to perform in the shadow theater. The cooperative activity takes on additional meaning now since there will be at least one student in the home group who will be an ***expert*** on the play and will likely become a main assistant in the teaching and artistic development of the play's performance. Again, students read through the play and study its story elements using graphic organizers, framed plot paragraphs, sequence strips, etc. When students are secure in their understanding of their play, they begin to create

their puppets and decide upon the roles group members will take in their presentation of the play (narrator, puppeteer, etc.).

ASSESSMENT/ THE CRITIC:

One of the best parts of the jigsaw activity is that the teacher as facilitator is free to visit groups and observe group behavior and dynamics. He/She may take notes on the group or on individual students who are to be observed.

Student story maps and planning sheets become a tool for assessment.

- Are students able to find a problem and solution to the tale?
- What main events did they find the most important?

The students complete a self-assessment of their project.

- *Did they listen to others in their group and summarize ideas when necessary?*
- *What did they do well with at least one other student in the group?*

Why not have students brainstorm criteria for a self-assessment rubric. The activity is authentic and student-centered , so students should assume more of the responsibility.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED FOR YOUR THEATER

⇒ **stage: a tri-fold science display board with the center cut out**

⇒ **paint- any color to cover the cardboard display board**

⇒ **screen- a piece of cotton fabric available at craft or sewing stores**

(additional option: wrapping paper cut-outs or stickers)

⇒ **poster board/ oak tag- heavy weighted paper product to create characters or scenery**

⇒ **dowel sticks -attach to shadow puppet with tape or other adhesive material so as to allow easy handling**

⇒ **light - clamp lights available at hardware stores are inexpensive. You can also use an adjustable floor lamp**

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR TALES:

Daly, Niki. (1995). *Why the sun and moon live in the sky.* New York: Lothrop, Lee and Shephard Books.

Ehlert, Lois. (1992). *Moon rope: a Peruvian folktale.* San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

House, Leslie. (1994). *Rabbit on the moon.* In *Davidson's Story Club: Multicultural folktales from around the world.* MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Mayo, Gretchen. (1987). *Star Tales: North American Indian tales about the stars.* New York: Walker.

Palazzo-Craig, Janet. (1996). *How night came to be.* Mahwah, NJ: Troll Associates.

Vaughn, Richard. (1993). *Lift the sky up: a Snohomish Indian legend.* Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co.

Mitchell Bobrick received his Master of Arts Degree in TESOL from New York University. He has been a teacher for seventeen years and currently teaches ESOL at West Gate Elementary School in Palm Beach County.